

## **Iraq**

### **Baghdad Uses POW's To Boost Own, Hurt Opponents' Morale**

*Tacitly admitting an inability to defend stationary targets against allied air attacks, Baghdad's announced decision to use captured allied pilots as human shields appears to be a psychological tactic intended to undermine its opponents' morale and reassure the Iraqi people that it is trying to protect them. President Saddam Husayn's promise to supporters who might be arrested for committing terrorist attacks against allied interests that they would be released as POW's at the end of the war suggests that he regards allied POW's as valuable bargaining chips in an ultimate prisoner exchange.*

A statement by an Iraqi military spokesman, broadcast by Baghdad radio on 21 January, said that Baghdad had decided "to distribute the captured pilots, numbering more than 20 prisoners, among scientific, economic, and other selected targets" in Iraq. Suggesting a perceived need to reassure the Iraqi public of some protection against allied air attacks, the spokesman's statement said that this use of the POW's was "one of the measures" adopted to counter the "unjust" air attacks against Iraqi "civilian, economic, and scientific targets within the cities" that have resulted in civilian "martyrs and wounded." A day earlier, the presentation of captured allied pilots on Iraqi television (Iraqi News Agency [INA], 20 January) was another evident effort to boost Iraqi morale, demoralize other allied pilots, and unsettle public opinion within the anti-Saddam coalition.

Baghdad's need for morale-boosting propaganda materials was further evidenced by Saddam's order that citizens assist Iraqi media and the Ministry of Culture and Information in photographing and documenting Iraqi successes in the war (INA, 19 January) and by the government's offer of a reward of 10,000 dinars or \$20,000 to Iraqis and non-Iraqis, respectively, for apprehending or reporting the whereabouts of downed foreign pilots (Baghdad radio, 19 January).

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**Saddam's Promise  
to Terrorists**

In a speech broadcast by Baghdad radio on 20 January, Saddam made a promise to prospective pro-Iraq terrorists that suggests that captured pilots would be of far greater value to Iraq alive than dead in any future exchange of prisoners. After urging his "supporters" outside Iraq to "target the interests" of "the assembly of evil, treason, and corruption everywhere"—an unmistakable allusion to terrorist attacks against the interests of members of the anti-Iraq coalition—Saddam assured those who might be captured as a result of heeding his call that their captors would have no choice but to treat them as de facto war prisoners rather than criminals and that they would "inevitably be released when the war ends in accordance with international laws and agreements that govern the release of POW's."

Moreover, an Iraqi presidential spokesman, cited by INA and Baghdad radio on 22 January, indicated that a pilots-for-terrorists exchange is part of Saddam's contingency planning, at least as a propaganda ploy to revive the concept of linkage between the Kuwait and Palestine issues. Avoiding earlier euphemisms, the spokesman described the locations to which the pilots were dispersed as "military targets," and he said that Iraq "is prepared to deal with the POW's on the basis of the Geneva Conventions provided this is also applied to the Palestinian people in the occupied territories and the Palestinian Arab mujahidin who fell prisoner while fighting for the sake of Palestine and its people." Failing that, he added, "we will be under no obligation."

**Implications**

Iraq's initial exploitation of the POW's resembles its initial treatment of foreigners trapped in Iraq and Kuwait when Kuwait was invaded on 2 August, a policy that Baghdad eventually changed when Iraq concluded it had outlived its usefulness. Although Baghdad may have had some small hope that using POW's as human shields could marginally influence the targeting of the allied forces, its primary purpose in announcing the use of POW's as shields seems to be to boost its own people's morale and to undermine popular support within the coalition, as well as to encourage those of its Palestinian and other allies willing to engage in terrorism. Given Baghdad's past experience with the antagonism that the concept of human shields arouses in the West, its resort to this tactic now suggests a desperate need to counteract the evident impression among the Iraqi people that they have no adequate defense against allied air attacks. Saddam's representation of terrorists as POW's on the same day that his POW policy was announced also suggests that he may need the POW's as an insurance policy and may thus be motivated to keep at least most of them alive.